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ABSTRACT

One of 52 theoretical papers on school crime and its relation to poverty, this chapter considers the perspective that violence and vandalism in schools are a structural rather than a personal problem. Various facets of the schooling process are discussed with an emphasis on past and present meaning of forms of social control and how these may be dysfunctional to the learning process and contribute to delinquency and vandalism. The meaning of the school experience to the student is crucial, and consensus of perspective is necessary to achieve social order. Why the latter is not being achieved is discussed, and suggestions for change are presented. (Author/MLF)

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SCHOOLS:

ANTIQUATED SYSTEMS OF SOCIAL CONTROL

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The perspective that violence and vandalism in schools is a structural rather than a personal problem is considered. Various facets of the schooling process are discussed with an emphasis on past and present meaning of forms of social control and how these may be dysfunctional to the learning process and contribute to delinquency and vandalism. The meaning of the school experience to the student is crucial, and consensus of perspective is necessary to achieve social order. Why the latter is not being achieved is discussed, and suggestions for change are presented.

Introduction

The high rates of disorder and violence in high schools have been fairly well documented (cf. Bailey, 1970; Westin, 1970; Ritterband & Silberstein, 1973; see also reports by the California State Department of Education, 1975, and by the Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, 1975). Historically, violence and vandalism have not been uncommon in the public school system. However, the incidents before the sixties seem to have been sporadic and isolated (Westin, 1970). As recently as 1964, a survey of public school teachers revealed that they felt that only about 3 percent of their students were discipline problems (Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, 1975). Today, the situation has changed, both on the attitudinal level and on the level of recorded incidence of crime in schools. In a survey conducted in 1972, "54 percent of the teachers found student disruption of their classrooms to be a problem of moderate to critical proportions" (Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, 1975, p. 3). This subcommittee also reported from a survey of 750 school districts that violence is found in every section of the nation and continues to escalate. The subcommittee found that in the three years between 1970 and 1973:

(A) Homicides increased by 18.5 percent;
(B) Rapes and attempted rapes increased by 40.1 percent;
(C) Robberies increased by 36.7 percent;
(D) Assaults on students increased by 85.3 percent;
(E) Assaults on teachers increased by 77.4 percent;
(F) Burglaries of school buildings increased by 11.8 percent;
(G) Drug and alcohol offenses on school property increased by 37.5 percent; and
(H) Dropouts increased by 11.7 percent.

With these types of increases in crimes in schools, it should not be surprising that the number of weapons found in schools has also risen. The subcommittee reports a 54.4 percent increase in weapons confiscated between 1970 and 1973.

The problem seems to be most acute in large schools within urban areas. Both the subcommittee report and the California report note that the incidence of violence, especially vandalism, increases with size of school and urban density. A rather discouraging note is that the estimated cost of the vandalism is 500 million dollars per year (Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, 1975), which represents more money per student than the public schools spend on books.

Although the documentation of crime in schools has been fairly elaborate at the descriptive level, attempts to explain increases in deviance, delinquency, and disorder in schools have not been very successful. Most of these

have assumed that the delinquent student if somehow different from the nondelinquent one.

Differences such as academic achievement, social background, race, participation in extracurricular activities, and the like have been presented as key variables. However, the problem has been that none of these variables seem capable of explaining a great deal of the variance involved in who commits acts of disorder in school (Senna, Rathus, & Siegel, 1974; Schafer, 1969; Shewin, 1969; Werthman, 1963). In reality, all types, or at least many different types, of students are engaging in disruptive activities. It would appear, then, that an analysis of the structure of schooling may be in order, since it seems that analysis at the individual level is not working well. It would be impossible to discuss all the facets of the schooling process in this short paper, and, therefore, we shall narrow our discussion to forms of social control utilized by the schools in the past to ensure conformity on the part of students. We shall then attempt to explain why those forms no longer are appropriate and why they may even be exacerbating the present disruption.

Consequences of the Schooling Process

When considering disorders in high schools, our viewpoint or model requires that we not think of schools as insluated environments of learning where youngsters are

only taught to be literate. Outsiders usually view schools as merely settings for the professed formalized goals of education. Insiders, experiencing or working in the situation, have quite different perceptions. These people know that the consequences of the schooling process are very different from those expected by the general public.

At least three consequences can be identified: custody-control, certification, and selection (Spady, 1973). We shall only speak to the first consequence, as it is most intimately related to the behavior of the students. The custody-control function is a manifest result of the compulsory attendance laws. These laws force young people to attend school until they reach some arbitrary age. Without commenting on the logic behind magical cutoff points, we can see that the imposition of the legal system on the educational system creates an organization managing some clients who are involuntary members (Bidwell, 1970). Running any organization which includes involuntary members, whether it be a prison or a school, requires establishing some social control mechanisms through which the "involuntary and coercive aspects of the custody-control function are minimized" (Spady, 1973, p. 5). If this aspect of the system is ignored by the managers, they create the potential for a high level of friction.

Keeping in mind the custody aspect of the system we begin to see that for the students school is much more

than getting a formal education. They have to spend one third of their day inside the confines of the physical space known as school. They have to be in and "on" and out and "off" at certain hours. They must eat at a certain hour and rest and play at a certain hour. In many cases they must even relieve themselves of bodily wastes at particular time periods. They must do things on schedule whether they care to or not. Gym at 8 a.m., say, may or may not coincide with their body clocks and personal interests, but nevertheless they must compete at certain times and cooperate at other times.

School, then, cannot be defined as merely a place where education occurs, or even where only subjugation, indoctrination, or socialization happens. Being in school is a full-time social experience subject to all the laws of how social experience becomes defined and interpreted by individuals. The meaning of the schooling experience is a social object that can only be understood within the matrix or intersection of many lines of social action being carried out simultaneously by many participants. It should be obvious, then, that school means different things to the various participants. Yet, since schools have persisted over such a long period of time in a form or structure that hasn't really changed that much, one might be led to assume that these various lines of action are somehow complementary. One way to view a social organization is

as the integrating, or complementing, of various lines of action (Shibutani, 1961). At one time in the history of American schools this may have been the case, but the rising incidence of crime in the schools may indicate that the lines are in conflict at least as often as they complement each other.

We do not intend to glorify the past. It would be naive to believe that more learning went on in our schools in previous generations. (Even though the last 10 years have witnessed a drop in SAT scores, interpretations of those scores has not been resolved.) One thing most observers feel was true about schools in the past was that among students there was a general willing, orderly submission to school rules. Why were students so willing to be subjected to the rules and regulations of schools? What was the complementary nature of the roles of those students, teachers, and administrators, and what maintained them? We believe there may be some utility to examining these questions from a social psychological perspective and to achieving a plausible definition of power, which we think is pertinent to understanding these questions.

Willing Subjugation

One of the foundations of organized human behavior is the willing subjugation of individual interests to group rules for the benefit of the group (Lindesmith, Strauss,

& Denzin, 1975). Since there is no known biological motivation inducing people to act in a collective manner, something else must lie at the heart of cooperation. Following the social interactionist position, we would propose that consensus of perspective was one of the critical elements in order in previous school generations (Shibutani, 1961). There must be a commanding degree of consensus concerning the meaning of various activities for any organization to operate without major disorders. Furthermore, various group norms will emerge over time; thus, what at one point is problematic is taken for granted at another point and at still another point may be sacred. For example, a generation ago, if a student continually talked in class and the teacher told him to remain after school, how did the other students react? They really did not react at all. The question was never really raised as to whether or not the teacher has the right or authority to impose such punishment. The teacher's authority was based primarily on tradition and was accepted a priori by the vast majority of students (Werthman, 1963). The sharing of this particular perspective created a belief system which was taken for granted. Of course the teacher had the right; how else could it be? But, why was this so? Where was the consensus originally developed?

The family is the primary institution for the inculcation of basic values and our taken-for-granted

belief systems. Most observers agree, however, that the American family, particularly the white middle-class family,[1] has undergone substantial change in the past several decades. Richard Flacks (1971), notes that the authority structure of the family has undergone significant change, moving from a rather strict authoritarian type to a more democratic one. We maintain that the present structure of the school system reflects the authority structure of an earlier, mid-twentieth-century form of family life. The teacher's authority does not rest on any rational agreement with students; it rests on the tradition of a hierarchy of status based on age and social position (Werthman, 1963; Marolla & Franks, 1977). Thus, today, the authority structure of the family reflects a more egalitarian philosophy, but the schools, in many cases, have not made significant parallel changes. Flack states the problem this way:

> There is a restlessness with conditions of arbitrary or coercive authority. Such feelings might derive from expectations developed in the family for authority structures based on egalitarianism--expectations derived from parental fostering of participation, independence and autonomy and parental refusal to use physical punishment or coercion. Children raised in this way, we can speculate, may grow to expect that authority outside the

[1] Although there are certainly differences in family-rearing practices across class, the differences are often rather small (see Erlanger, 1974).

> family will be similarly responsive, democratic, nonpunitive and permissive. A consequence of such dispositions and expectations about authority is the tendency to be unusually trusting of teachers and other adults, but vociferously and unusually upset, angry and rebellious when such authority figures betray expectations that will be egalitarian, democratic and so forth. (pp. 20-34)

One might expect that in the early grades the authority of the teacher would remain unchallenged, as the child is used to being treated as a child. This is not to say that the students do not get into trouble. Students may talk out of turn or chew gum or perform other such acts which get them into some difficulty. But this type of deviance is quite different from that of students who tell the teacher not to lay a hand on their shoulder unless the teacher wants a letter from their lawyer. The former is merely rule breaking; the latter is a direct power, or authority, confrontation. The confrontation is one of traditional order and authority versus the modern student's perceived rights and concept of individual choice. This is a critical point. As McPartland and McDill (1974) have pointed out, a school's stability (rates of truancy, vandalism, and protests) is related to the degree the students perceive the rules, or procedures through which the rules are enacted, as appropriate or legitimate. School stability depends more on "satisfaction with participation in rulemaking" than on satisfaction with the actual content

of the rules. This supports our contention that a large number of students no longer accept authority based on tradition, but rather have come to expect as a "right" a reasonable explanation for each rule. Let us examine how some of the student's rights have been negotiated out of the schools.

Learning is a very tenuous affair. The logistics of coordinating 20 to 35 students in one room is quite mind-boggling when we consider what we really expect to happen in our schools. Envision this situation. Thirty bodies, all wanting some attention, not only for their educational needs but equally (if not more so) for their identity or social needs (Becker, 1062). At least some want to be something or somebody within this structure, and others, after various negative experiences, want to hide or withdraw. It is not by accident that students engage in classroom dramas with more or less commitment for it would be quite impossible for a teacher to handle simultaneously 30 students truly committed to the leanring process.

The envisioned sociometrics of one teacher and thirty pupils should lead one to understand that the teacher cannot possibly control the feedback (either negative or positive) from and toward all the students. He/she cannot possibly hold the attention of all the students at one time. This

necessitates some kind of negotiation. Thus, the students who tune out or hide in the cracks in the classroom process are just as necessary to social order as the one who commit themselves to whatever the teacher wants them to do.

Although the students are committed to varying degrees of order, we maintain that when there is order it is because the students share a common perspective with the teacher. That perspective can vary quite dramatically from school to school in many subtle ways. Regardless of the school, what gets defined as good work, goofing off, and studying must be shared by all participants if there is to be order. Given the limitations of the current self-contained classroom, the teacher and students must come to an agreement on what is acceptable behavior, as well as what is not and where the middle ground is located. The student who wants too much attention is just as much a disturbance as a student who is lighting matches in the back of the room. As Wasserman (1970) put it, "An equilibrium becomes established in which the school officials tolerate as much vandalism and truance as may be needed to prevent their position...from being directly threatened."

The primary goal of establishing order takes precedence over human rights and education. This should not be surprising to students of social organization; Erving Goffman (1961) found a similar phenomenon in mental hospitals. A normative arrangement emerges from the

structural constraints of time, space, energy, and other such factors. This set of norms is then rationalized by the school authorities. It has little to do with current educational philosophy but a great deal to do with the existing limitations which led to such arrangements as age grouping, ability grouping, involuntary attendance, 50-minute classes, and 21-week semesters. Since most of what we now have in terms of structure was established long before the development of the idea of a student, teenage, or youth culture, the teachers and administrators assumed all-pervasive authority over the students, both formally (legally) and informally (parental consent). The students were entitled to neither formal nor informal authority, This, of course, has not been viewed as a travesty of justice. The early 1900s were not a time when youth were held in high regard other than as bodies for the growing industrial machine. In fact, youth was a time of waiting to become a responsible adult (Coleman, 1974). The lack of any rights on the part of students has been considered historically quite appropriate.

Today, in contrast, we are living in a much more youth-oriented culture. As Theodore Roszak (1969) said in the sixties, "The interests of our college-age and adolescent young in the psychology of alienation, oriental mysticism, psychedelic drugs...comprise a cultural constellation that radically diverges from values and assumptions...

in the mainstream of our society" (p. 12). Coleman (1961) delineated the notion of a youth culture in his early work, a systematic study of the value orientations of students in high schools. Since that time, the emphasis in our culture on the value of being young has certainly increased.

If the emphasis on athletics is still as pervasive as it was in 1961 (Coleman, 1961), then we must ask ourselves what the young people of today infer from the fact that their heroes retire before the age of 35 and sometimes before 30. Furthermore, the advertising industry contributes heavily to the development of a consciousness of kind for youth. In 1971 the Broadcasting Yearbook estimated that home television sets are turned on an average of six hours and eighteen minutes per day (Lyle, 1972). Since we know that a substantial percentage of advertising money is spent in an attempt to attract the teenage market, we must assume that youth feel more of an identity with their group than ever before.

All this has been occurring outside the school context. The schools themselves have remained structurally stagnant (with the possible exception of some free schools and some open schools, which comprise a minority in public school education). It is little wonder, then, that the common perspective stating teachers know best, which implies they

should have complete authority, has become increasingly absurd to high school students. The basic consensus that formerly pervaded the educational institution has been eroded and the power of the administration is now questionable. Couple this with the fact that the very structure of the classroom experience creates the necessity of some of the students tuning out, and one can begin to understand why disorder is not only possible but should be expected.

Social organization implies some type of social control and social control implies a power relationship. Schools may be viewed as playgrounds for power transactions. As Hawley (1963) put it, "Every social act is an exercise of power, every social relationship is a power equation and every social group or system is an organization of power. Accordingly, it is possible to transpose any system of social relationships into terms of potential or active power" (p. 422). Schools are no exception. A struggle over who will dictate the action is continuously being waged. What is happening in our schools today is that the old power equations have been upset and are no longer applicable.

Power is influenced by two factors: "resources committed and resistance encountered" (Olson, 1970, p. 4). One participant must have resources bigger or more

extensive than himself to wield social power in any situation (i.e., the normative role structure). The mechanisms of social control are resources for some participants (teachers and administrators) to be used against others (students). One must keep in mind, however, that the control is only as dependable as the resource. In other words, when a particular mechanism of social control is becoming less and less applicable to a number of people, it is losing its dependability and predictability. The first and possibly most critical type of control, agreement over who has authority to do what, has been broken in today's schools. If our exposition has been clear, it should be evident that the causes of this erosion have been within the structure of the school system itself and have involved some historical change. We should also comment on other forms of control operative in previous generations.

Social Sanctions

Another form of social control which teachers and schools utilized in the past was social sanctions. In order to entice students to conform in school, special considerations, such as encouragement and honors, can be given to particular students. These sanctions can be more or less formalized. One of the more obviously formalized

types of social sanction is the awarding of grades. Grades are symbolic representations of positive of negative evaluations of a student's performance. As long as students felt that it was important for them to be academically "good" students, then grades could be used to ensure a certain amount of behavioral conformity. However, as early as 1961, Coleman (1961) reported that achievement in academic roles is often not valued nearly as much as popularity or athletic accomplishments. We would expect this to vary from school to school, but the value of academic achievement in our society is under highly critical review by youth and others (Colemen, 1961; Jencks, 1972), and, consequently, the effectiveness of grades as a social control mechanism is now limited.

If we were to accept a rational model of youth behavior, then Stinchcombe's (1964) argument that youth no longer see any connection between what they do in school and later outcomes becomes even more devastating. He asserts that student rebellion will emerge when there is little correspondence between students' present roles and their anticipated work roles: "We suggest that the key to high school rebellion is to be found in the status prospects of students, rather than in their status origins" (pp. 69-70). We would conclude that, since the publication of Coleman's and Stinchcombe's work, the situation has not improved.

Given the current job situation, the lack of correspondence between grades and one's future job aspirations is probably more acute. Therefore, the pool of students who fall into the group who do not see much of a connection between their school activities and their job aspirations is probably even larger today than it was in 1964. Here, again, we see the dissolution of a formerly successful type of social control.

Peer Pressure

Developmental theorists have singled out the pre-high-school and high school years as a period of intense peer pressure. Much research on the secondary school has reported that students' age and grade peers provide the major source of both self- and other evaluation. Coleman's (1961) study of the impact of adolescent subcultures remains one of the most extensive:

> This setting apart of our children in schools--which take on ever more "extracurricular activities"--for an even longer period of training has a singular impact on the child of high school age. He is "cut-off" from the rest of society, forced inward toward his own age group, made to carry out his whole social life with others his own age. With his fellows, he comes to constitute a small society, one that has most of its important interactions within itself, and maintains only a few threads of connection with the outside adult society. In our modern world of mass communications and rapid diffusion of ideas and knowledge, it is hard to realize that separate subcultures can exist right under the very noses of adults--subcultures with languages all their own, with special symbols, and most importantly, with value systems that may differ from adults'. (p. 3)

As long as the peer group's values more or less coincided with those of the school authorities, the probability of certain types of disorder was lowered. However, the studies of Coleman (1961) and Cuzick (1973) indicate that student values do not necessarily coincide with those of the authorities. We are not trying to insist that peer influence is greater than that of parents or some other significant reference group; we are merely stating that a peer group has the potential for supporting disruption. Green (1969) found that delinquent behavior is related positively to number of delinquent friends and to srtong peer orientation (regardless of whether the peers were delinquent) and negatively to strong family orientation.

It has also been reported by Schafer, Olexa, and Polk (1970) that the tracking system used in many high schools can create a student subculture of deviants in which antagonistic attitudes toward teachers are rewarded by the deviant's peers. Since one's peer group is the group within which most of a typical day's interactions occur, it is reasonable to assume that deviant behavior can become appropriate and self-gratifying. Werthman (1963) notes that even the simple behavior of raising one's hand in class or showing up for class on time may be viewed by one's peers as validating the teachers or school authority and therefore not appropriate behavior. If an important

of the power or effect of normative structure is the evaluation of one's peers, then it would seem that one should not expect the normative structure that once existed in schools to operate nearly as effectively today.

Physical Force

The final and oldest form of social control we address is physical force. There are very few teachers who have not at one time or another physically tried to control a student, if only to grab the student by the arm and direct him/her to some authority-type office. But there are other forms of physical force. When the schools have to resort to locking doors from the inside, barring windows, and having armed policemen patrol corridors, then we have reached the point of controlling by force. Ertukel (1974) reports that

> A high school in Los Angeles is known as "Fort Crenshaw" because of its steel-mesh fence, armed guards, and classroom doors that lock from either side. In another school, security problems are handled by a building monitor. (p. 44)

The complement of utilizing this kind of control is the loss of the few rights and privileges that students had. As Friedenburg (1971) put it:

> There is no public high school where students possess any authority as opposed to influence. Not only do freedoms not exist as matters of rights, when they are conceded in any particular case, the administration points out that it is "giving the kids the opportunity to learn how to use freedom" or "helping kids learn to be responsible," it is clear freedom is a privilege, not a right for the students. (p. 118)

What is the effect of spending six to eight hours a day in a place that controls you in many cases against your own interests and desires.

Comment

If our argument has any basis, then it should be recognized that one of the basic tenets of social organization is being broken in most schools. That principle is the unifying principle of a collective purpose. As social animals, people have the ability to subordinate their individual interests to the good of the group. However, in the case of our high schools, the educational process is not seen as the collective purpose. How could it be by students who have no rights, who attend involuntarily, who are seldom asked what they want to learn, who must conform to regimentation, and who must perform according to rules which must, in many cases, seem quite arbitrary?

We do not mean to imply that social organization always necessitates the realization of collective purpose. However, in this particular situation, there is a group which identifies itself separately from the rest of the organization. This youth culture has a consciousness of kind that is supported in many aspects of everyday life outside the school. It should not be surprising, then,

that individuals from this group may attack the rest of the organization through vandalism or some other form of deviance and get support for so doing from their peers. Furthermore, we would propose that a vicious cycle may be set in motion. The more acts of disruption or deviance that occur in a particular school, the more the administration may feel compelled to use physical force to control the school (such as armed police). These forms of control may work temporarily, but one of the consequences of such action is further to alienate the students from feeling that the school is in any sense their own organization. In other words, the school and everyone associated with it are separated from the students, who may become unwilling prisoners.

We maintain, then, that forcing students to conform or be forced to leave the system may work on a superficial level, but such force alienates the students from any real connection to the collective process of becoming educated. To return to our original point, schools are social objects. They come to represent different things to different people. When some youth break into a school over the weekend and rampage through offices and rooms, it is not <u>their</u> school that they are defiling. Rather, it is the school of the teachers and administrators and that group of students who conform to the rules. The Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency (1975) reached a similar conclusion:

> Perhaps the most serious aspect of vandalism is the set of messages it conveys: that students look upon the school as alien territory, hostile to their ambitions and hopes; that the education which the system is attempting to provide lacks meaningfulness; that students feel no pride in the edifices in which they spend most of their days. (p.7)

Conclusions

Where do we go from here? We can no longer be satisfied with a custodial type of educational institution. The students simply will not tolerate it any longer. What this paper has tried to demonstrate is that former types of social control--authority based on tradition, the use of grades and awards as sanctions, positive peer influence, and physical force--are no longer effective means of getting students to join the collective enterprise of becoming educated. If we are truly interested in education, we might begin by legitimately involving the students in the educational process as more than just spectators, or unwilling "cattle" as one of our colleagues put it. Education must be structured so as to lead to commitment, and not to alienation, on the part of students. A look a Howard Becker's (1960) definition of commitment will help to make the point:

> First, the individual is in a position in which his decision with regard to some particular line of action has consequences for other interests and activities not necessarily (directly) related to it.

> Second, he has placed himself in that position by his own prior actions. A third element is present though so obvious as not to be apparent: the committed person must be aware (of these other interests) and must recognize that his decision in this case will have ramifications beyond it. (pp. 35-36)

The first point speaks to the necessary integration of the student role with other activities outside the school. The student must be in a position such that success and reward in the school mean something beyond the limits of the schooling experience, and, in particular, influence future access to opportunity.

Secondly, the students must believe that they are in control of what is happening now and what may happen in the future. Students must feel responsible for their own behavior, and not place the control or blame in the hands of others (the school authorities). Finally, as Stinchcombe (1964) pointed out, students must recognize that decisions made in school will affect other interests that they have outside school and for the future.

The basic premise being stated here is that if a person invests a certain amount of time and energy--invests his/her very self into a particular line of action or identity--he/she will become committed to avoiding behaviors that risk the disruption or noncontinuance of the commitment. Schools, then, must concentrate on developing students' commitment to identities that complement the collective

purpose of learning (not identities that complement the functions of custody-control, certification, and selection). These identities must be long-term in nature and not restricted to the school setting.

The last form of power that the schools have to tap is the students. Only when schools start making honest attempts to find out who their students are and what their concepts of life are, will they become better equipped to serve them and teach them. We must stop assuming that students are blobs which come empty of identity and purpose. We must respect them as human beings who want to know things and be somebody. This is not to say that students always know what is best for them. But, rather, as reported by McPartland and McDill (1974) and Werthman (1963), if students believe that the schooling process is legitimate and/or fair, the probability of disruption is dramatically reduced.

Finally, the educational literature is replete with ways of physically controlling violence and vandalism in high schools--from personnel living in trailers on school grounds to constant surveillance of all properties by video equipment. These may be necessary stopgap procedures, but they treat the symptom, not the cause, of the problem. Furthermore, if we are right in our assumption that the effect of physical force is to alienate students from their

own schools, then these techniques will not result in furthering education, but will probably only motivate many students to become more ingenious vandals.

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